

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1217

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

CINCPAC

USSAG

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 7912

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: EAID, MOPS, PFOR, ECON, LA

SUBJECT: TALK WITH FONMIN PHOUMI VONGVICHIT

1. I CALLED ON FONMIN PHOUMI THIS MORNING TO DISCUSS HIS RECENT TRIP TO THE UNITED STATES. PHOUMI WAS MOST CORDIAL AND APPEARED TO BE SINCERELY APPRECIATIVE OF THE MANNER IN WHICH HE HAD BEEN TREATED IN OUR COUNTRY.

2. AMERICAN AID. PHOUMI SAID HE HAD PARTICULARLY APPRECIATED THE OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE A TALK WITH SECRETARY KISSINGER. ALTHOUGH IT WAS CUSTOMARY AT A FIRST MEETING TO BE RESTRAINED, HE HAD BEEN SO IMPRESSED WITH THE SECRETARY'S INTEREST IN THE SITUATION IN LAOS THAT HE HAD SHARED WITH THE SECRETARY ALL HIS PRINCIPAL CONCERNS. HE SAID THAT HE HAD EXPLAINED TO THE SECRETARY THE NEED FOR ADDITIONAL AMERICAN ASSISTANCE AND THAT THE SECRETARY HAD SAID HE WOULD SEE WHAT HE COULD DO. PHOUMI SAID HE REALIZED THE SECRETARY HAD MANY OTHER PROBLEMS AND THAT HE RECOGNIZED THAT THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EMBASSY TO WASHINGTON WOULD BE THE BASIS ON WHICH WASHINGTON WOULD ESTABLISH AID LEVELS. HE ASKED FOR MY CONTINUED SUPPORT AND GOOD WILL.

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3. SISOUK MISSION. I REPLIED THAT IT WAS OUR ESTIMATE THAT AID

IN FY 75 WOULD BE APPROXIMATELY AT THE SAME LEVEL AS THAT OF FY 74. AFTER EXPLAINING THE RECENT DIFFICULTIES WITH REGARD TO THE PASSAGE OF THE CONTINUING RESOLUTION, I EXPRESSED THE VIEW THAT THE SISOUK MISSION WAS VERY UNLIKELY TO RESULT IN INCREASED AMERICAN AID. I SAID THAT WE WOULD OF COURSE BE DELIGHTED TO RECEIVE THE SISOUK MISSION BUT THAT I HOPED NO ONE WOULD BE DELUDED INTO THINKING THAT IT WOULD HAVE A POSITIVE RESULT. PHOUMI SAID THAT HE HAD BEEN THINKING ALONG THE SAME LINES AND ALTHOUGH HE DID NOT SAY SO, I GOT THE IMPRESSION THAT THE SISOUK MISSION TO WASHINGTON MIGHT WELL BE CALLED OFF.

4. COORDINATION OF AID. PHOUMI SAID THAT HE HAD COME BACK FROM HIS TRIP CONVINCED THAT AID TO LAOS SHOULD BE HANDLED IN A MANNER UNRELATED TO AID TO THE OTHER COUNTRIES OF INDOCHINA. LAOS WAS AT PEACE AND THE SITUATION HERE WAS ENTIRELY DIFFERENT FROM THAT IN CAMBODIA AND VIETNAM. I SAID THAT I UNDERSTOOD THIS POINT OF VIEW BUT THAT WASHINGTON CONSIDERED THAT THERE WERE VALID REASONS FOR AN INDOCHINA-WIDE PROGRAM.

5. POW/MIA. I TOLD PHOUMI THAT I FELT UNDER VERY CONSIDERABLE PRESSURE TO RESOLVE THE MIA PROBLEM AND ASKED HIM WHETHER THIS SUBJECT HAD BEEN RAISED BY THE SECRETARY DURING THEIR TALK IN NEW YORK. PHOUMI SAID THIS SUBJECT HAD NOT BEEN MENTIONED BUT THAT I SHOULD BE CONFIDENT THAT A DILIGENT EFFORT WOULD BE MADE IN THE NEAR FUTURE TO RESOLVE THE MIA QUESTION. I SAID THAT I HOPED THAT JCIA WOULD ADDRESS ITSELF TO THIS QUESTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AS IT REMAINED AN ISSUE OF GREAT CONCERN AT HOME.

6. LAO/THAI RELATIONS. I TOLD PHOUMI I HAD BEEN PLEASED TO SEE THAT ARRANGEMENTS FOR A VISIT IN THE NEAR FUTURE BY THE THAI FOREIGN MINISTER HAD BEEN MADE. PHOUMI SAID THAT THE THAI HAD WANTED HIM TO COME TO BANGKOK BUT THAT GIVEN HIS INEXPERIENCE, HE HAD WISHED TO HAVE THE VISIT TAKE PLACE IN VIENTIANE WHERE HE COULD CALL ON THE VARIOUS LAO MINISTRIES FOR ADVICE. HE WAS VERY PLEASED THAT THE THAI HAD AGREED TO COME TO LAOS AND THE VISIT WOULD HAVE A SALUTARY POLITICAL EFFECT AS IT WOULD DEMONSTRATE TO THE LAO PEOPLE THAT LAOS ENJOYED THE FRIENDLY SUPPORT OF THAILAND. I NOTED THAT THE WILLINGNESS OF THE RTG TO SET ASIDE THE QUESTION OF PROTOCOL AND SEND ITS FOREIGN MINISTER HERE, ALTHOUGH HE WAS THE SENIOR, SHOWED THE

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GOOD WILL WITH WHICH THE RTG WAS APPROACHING THE QUESTION OF IMPROVING ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH LAOS.

7. LAOS ECONOMY. PHOUMI SAID THAT HE WAS STILL VERY INTERESTED IN INCREASING LAO PRODUCTIVITY AND REDUCING THE NEED FOR FOREIGN AID. THE IMPORTATION OF FOODSTUFFS FROM THAILAND SHOULD BE REDUCED. I NOTED THAT A KEY ISSUE WAS THE ACHIEVEMENT OF PARITY OF PRICES ON BOTH SIDES OF THE FRONTIER. THERE WAS,

FOR EXAMPLE, A CEILING ON MEAT PRICES IN VIENTIANE AND I WAS SURE THAT LAO FARMERS WERE TAKING PIGS ACROSS THE MEKONG FOR SALE IN THAILAND BECAUSE OF THE MORE ADVANTAGEOUS PRICE THEY COULD OBTAIN THERE. PHOUMI AGREED THAT THIS WAS SO AND COMMENTED THAT IT WAS UP TO THE VILLAGERS THEMSELVES TO CONTROL THE ILLEGAL MOVEMENT OF FOODSTUFFS TO THAILAND. I SAID THAT I THOUGHT WATER WOULD FIND ITS NATURAL LEVEL AND THAT HUMAN NATURE WAS SUCH THAT FARMERS WOULD ALWAYS SEEK THE BEST PRICE FOR THEIR PRODUCE. TURNING TO MINING, PHOUMI ASKED WHETHER A POTASH DEPOSIT HAD BEEN FOUND AS A RESULT OF THE USAID/RLG DRILLING ON THE VIENTIANE PLAIN WHICH I HAD MENTIONED TO HIM. I SAID THAT UNFORTUNATELY NO POTASH HAD BEEN FOUND BUT THAT AN IMMENSE SALT BED HAD BEEN DISCOVERED. AT THIS MOMENT THE SALTY WATER IS BEING PUMPED FROM THE HOLE AND BOILED TO OBTAIN COMMERCIAL SALT. PHOUMI EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT AMERICAN ACTIVITIES OF THIS KIND WOULD BE CONTINUED AND SAID THAT IT WAS ESSENTIAL THAT LAO MINERAL DEPOSITS SHOULD BE EXPLOITED. I SAID THIS WOULD BE HARD TO DO UNTIL ROADS WERE OPENED AND TRUE UNITY HAD BEEN ACHIEVED. PHOUMI BRUSHED THIS OFF WITH THE COMMENT THAT THIS WOULD HAPPEN IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

8. COMMENT: OUR RELATIONS WITH PHOUMI AND HIS UNDERSTANDING OF U.S. POLICY AND PROGRAMS HERE HAVE BEEN SLOWLY IMPROVING IN RECENT MONTHS. I BELIEVE HIS TRIP TO THE U.S. HAS FURTHER REDUCED HIS SUSPICION AND MISTRUST. THE FACT THAT HE HEARD FROM THE SECRETARY HIMSELF THAT THE U.S. FULLY SUPPORTS A NEUTRAL AND INDEPENDENT LAOS, AND THE TONE OF HIS MEETINGS WITH THE SECRETARY AND WITH HABIB HAVE ALL CONTRIBUTED TO CLARIFYING OF OUR RELATIONS WITH THE PGNU.
WHITEHOUSE

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